



Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers  
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

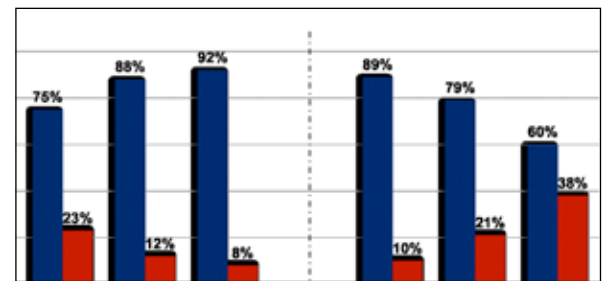
# Perspective



## From baseball to budgets

Allison Merzon runs long distances, athletic programs, and a union. Unlike the ultrathon, which one runs alone, she believes a union is a team effort.

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## No alternative?

Yes, there is an alternative to budget cuts and program reductions. It's called "1% on the 1%," and a new CFT-sponsored poll shows that the public likes the idea.

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## CFT-sponsored part-timer bills

Focus on part-timer legislation: three thumbs up, one thumb down.

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# Students resist fee increase proposal with "Ramen-ins"

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## Taking the lead

Carl Friedlander, CFT Community College Council President

# Defusing pension envy

An *L.A. Times*/USC poll released April 24 offered both encouragement and a warning to those of us working in California's community colleges and to the State's public sector workforce in general. The encouraging front page *Times* story on Sunday, April 24, began, "California voters agree with Gov. Jerry Brown that tax increases should help close the state budget deficit." This is good news that Republican legislators had better heed. But then came the next day's follow up story on the same poll, entitled "Voters Favor Pension Limits." The news in this story was not good, and we in CFT need to pay close attention.

The *Times* article on the pension polling includes an observation from Art Pulaski, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation. Pulaski says that the public is trapped in a "moment of envy" over benefits that he maintains are "far from lavish." He's right. Public pensions are, with rare exceptions, modest, but the overwhelming majority of Americans lack even modest retirement security. The only cure for the national epidemic of "pension envy" is to provide retirement security for all. But we have never discussed how to do that, though the work of the AFT's Ad Hoc Committee on Revenues and Retirement Security may jumpstart the beginning of an overdue discussion within the labor movement.

### Not lavish

The average CalSTRS member retiring today gets a \$4000 monthly allowance and no Social Security. The average is higher for fulltime community college faculty, and much lower for the part-time faculty who constitute the majority of the community college members in CalSTRS. Now \$4000 is not lavish, but to understand why even that amount can inspire envy, consider these

facts about private sector workers across the country:

- For a 66 year old worker retiring in 2011, the *maximum* monthly Social Security benefit (assuming earnings at the maximum taxable amount every year after age 21) is \$2,366
- The *average* monthly Social Security benefit is \$1,179
- The average value of 401(k) savings for Americans is currently around \$70,000
- So, to the typical Social Security retiree, \$4000 monthly sounds damn good, the CalSTRS and CalPERS "\$100,000+ clubs" look scandalous, and the UC executives who sued to have their pensions based on their full \$300,000-\$500,000 salaries seem like the ivory tower moral equivalents of Bell's Robert Rizzo. We ignore these widely held views at our own peril.

### Real villains

Of course, the real villains are the investment bankers, derivative traders and Wall St. executives who caused the financial crisis and who, through it all, have received obscene multi-million dollar salaries and bonuses. The financial crisis they caused did terrible damage to the funding levels of the public pension funds and private 401(k) accounts. The financial crisis and regressive tax policies depleted the revenues of state and local governments, focusing attention on the resource needs of the public pension systems at the same time health care, social services and education were having their funding slashed. We need to broadcast these truths about who's to blame often and loudly, but doing so won't necessarily swing public opinion to our side.

Among California's public pension systems, CalSTRS should be the least prominent target. It has the highest retirement age. Its employer

Public pensions are, with rare exceptions, modest, but the overwhelming majority of Americans lack even modest retirement security. The only cure for the national epidemic of "pension envy" is to provide retirement security for all.

and employee contribution rates have held steady for over twenty years, with no contribution "holidays." The State's direct contribution level was reduced from 4.6% to 2% in 1998. Spiking is prohibited. But along with other state and local pension plans, changes in CalSTRS must be made if we want to preserve defined benefit pensions for the next generation of K-12 and community college teachers.

All the actuarial evidence indicates that contributions need to increase, that CalSTRS can't invest its way out of its funding problem. For new employees, a defined benefit cap must be sensibly crafted (the highest paid employees can easily supplement their capped DB with savings). The benefit for all retirees should be calculated using three consecutive

years, not the highest single year. "Air time" purchasing should be scrapped. Other changes are needed, most of them identified by the Governor in his pension proposals.

### Sensible steps

CalSTRS, unlike other public pension systems, cannot be changed through collective bargaining. Legislation and ballot measures are the only available routes, with the former much less risky. Labor elected Jerry Brown and both houses of the legislature have strong Democratic majorities. In a nation where even modest retirement security is now widely viewed as the "privilege" of a small minority, we can't eliminate pension envy. But we'd be wise to take sensible steps that would help defuse it. **CC**

## MARK YOUR 2011 CALENDAR

May 9 – 13	Statewide Week of Action
May 13	Community College Council, Sheraton Gateway, Los Angeles
May 14	CFT State Council, Sheraton Gateway, Los Angeles
June 27 – 29	2011 CFT Leadership Institute, UCLA
September 23	Community College Council, Marriott Manhattan Beach
September 24	CFT State Council, Marriott Manhattan Beach
October 1	CFT Committees, LA Valley College, Los Angeles

## Perspective

The California Federation of Teachers is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

The CFT represents over 120,000 educational employees working at every level of education in California. The CFT is committed to raising the standards of the profession and to securing the conditions essential to provide the best service to California's students.

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# Allison Merzon: From baseball to budgets

When Allison Merzon ran for local union president at Cuesta Community College three years ago, she had no idea she'd be running straight into the state's budget buzz saw. She looked forward to a term in which issues like academic freedom and collegiality would highlight her union work. What she got was an economic crisis.

"I had some preparation," she says wryly. "I'd been Dean for workforce development for a year, which gave me a chance to manage a \$3 million budget, as well as to work on grants that made me familiar with the process of trying to find funding. But in reality no one anticipated that things would be as bad as they are now."

She made one additional leap of faith into the future, besides assuming her union responsibilities. She gave birth to her second son just as she was assuming office. "So I guess you could say he's growing up in the union," she laughs.

The budget crisis, however, is impossible to laugh at. The district marketing director Stephan Gunsaulus told the local newspaper that it would be "a disaster for the community." He predicted recently that the college would turn away over 3,000 students next fall, owing to budget shortfalls.

Cuesta is not alone, of course. Statewide, over 400,000 students may be refused admission to community colleges, according to California's Community College Chancellor Jack Scott. The system was designed as the higher education institution



Allison Merzon is an ultrathroner, and in for the long haul with her faculty union.

that would be accessible to all, but it faces at least an \$800 million cut in state funding, almost 10% of its total budget.

## No place to go

Cuesta has additional problems, though. It may receive no Proposition 98 funds next year. If the legislature doesn't rescind the funding formula with a two-thirds vote, the district will "only" have to turn away 2,000 students. But without it, over 3,000 central coast students will have no place to go.

Governor Jerry Brown asked the legislature to put measures on the ballot that would give voters a chance to extend temporary taxes to help resolve the state budget deficit, but Republicans refused to go along. The governor then increased tuition at community colleges from \$26 to \$36 per unit, a 38% hike. Each increase in fees, however, results in a loss of thousands of students unable to afford it.

"We already lost \$1 million in faculty salaries last year," Merzon explains, "and the number of sections was reduced as a result. Now we're looking at a \$700,000 loss in faculty salaries for the fall."

Anticipating such events, the union has always had recall rights written into the contract, "but now we want bumping rights as well, so that faculty with time vested in the school have a greater chance to stay," she says. Currently, the college employs 152 full time instructors. Last year, 15 were given notice they'd have to leave, but six were then rehired. There are about 400 part time teachers as well.

## Triple budget whammy

"Cuesta has really suffered from a triple budget whammy," according to Merzon. "We're currently on probation with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, which has raised questions about the district's financial stability. We've had a structural deficit

for a long time, and for the last several years we've been able to cover it through growth. But that time has run out."

A second problem, she says, is that "Cuesta's taken out \$33 million in loans to buy buildings and parking lots but lost a bond issue intended to pay for them. And lastly, even with the massive cuts they're projecting, we still have a budget gap that could be as much as \$3 million."

**"People have different leadership styles. I believe that the best leaders are the ones who get other people to believe they're doing things themselves. I'm a bottom-up kind of person. I like to listen to people, and to empower them."**

Another challenge is that many district administrators are new, including the third human relations director in three years, and new vice-presidents for academic affairs and student services. They have a working relationship with the union. "I'd say they're progressive for the most part," she says with a laugh, "and if you asked them, I think they'd say that while I challenge them a lot, I also want to collaborate. Having been an interim dean myself for a year helps me understand their point of view too."

Earlier in the decade the relationship was a lot rockier. In 2003 the district and union went to fact-finding. The union accused the district of being unwilling to bargain, after it replaced its negotiator with a hostile attorney. In 2005 the faculty took a no-confidence vote in the board, which eventually resulted in a renewed agreement. That year the faculty and district also squared off over



Allison at CFT convention with Cuesta AFT Local 4909 executive board member Kevin Bontenbal.

academic freedom, when the board attempted to clamp down on a student production of the musical, *Cabaret*.

"In a conservative community like this, I also think it's part of the responsibility that comes with being union president to be sensitive to any encroachment on academic freedom, and to resist it," Merzon says. "Now, though, our problems are all budget, all of the time."

To help pull the union together to play an active role in the budget debates, she draws on her professional experience. She's taught in the physical education department for sixteen years, and coached the women's softball team for 12 of them. "I like to make teams succeed," she explains. "I admire people who understand their roles, and who can work together for a common purpose. I like to move people to succeed, and I believe that you can do that if you are consistent in pursuit of your goal."

She's an ultrathroner herself; she just finished the American River "50 Miler" on April 9. "I may not be fast, but I get to the end," she claims.

## Team style

The team style carries over into the union in other ways, she believes. "People have different leadership styles," Merzon explains. "I believe that the best leaders are the ones who get other people to believe they're doing things themselves. I'm a bottom-up kind of person. I like to listen to people, and to empower them."

Empowering the faculty, she says, was part of her campaign platform. "I want to give them a real role in the union. So first we all had to educate ourselves about the contract, which meant spend-

ing time on that. I know people want to contribute, so I tell them, 'Don't just call the union when you get in trouble.'"

Cuesta College is the first and only place Merzon has taught. After graduating from the University of California at Davis, she had other positions at non-profit agencies and in the athletic world. But then she began to consider running an athletic program at a school. [Olympic coach] "Brooks Johnson told me that before I could run a program, I had to teach and coach a sport myself, work in the trenches." Cuesta President Gil Stork gave her that chance when he hired her, and she's been at the college since.

With her two boys and husband John, she moved to a home just outside town, where her family has been joined by 14 chickens. "I teach aspects of health, so this was a chance to put my beliefs and ideas in practice," she says. Occasionally she visits her parents in Pacific Grove. "They're pretty conservative, so it's been a learning experience for them, when I sit down and try to explain all the difficulties we face in the union. But they listen to me and try to understand."

"I believe in unions. They provide the balance, especially in education, where we're moving so fast toward the corporate world. We see decisions made all the time that aren't in the best interests of the faculty. What recommitted me to this work, though, was when I heard Marty Hittelman say at the most recent CFT Convention that "our working conditions are the learning conditions of our students." We're not just protecting faculty, but other people in the college too. So in the end, I just decided to do what I think is right."

By David Bacon

## The state budget

Are we *déjà vu* yet?

Although Jerry Brown walked back into the governor's mansion with eyes open, the state budget negotiation process hasn't exactly gone as he might have wished.

He inherited a \$25 billion state budget deficit over 18 months. He didn't want a cuts-only approach; he recognized the human devastation that that would cause. So he proposed a "balanced approach" of cuts and tax extensions. But he warned that if he didn't get the votes for his tax extensions, a cuts-only budget it would be. "No more smoke and mirrors," he said.

Upon taking office the new top state official promised he would talk with everyone and gain consensus. He wanted to move forward together, with hands across the aisle. Partisan wrangling should be left behind for the good of all the citizenry.

**Just two**

And that shouldn't be so difficult, right? Assuming his own party was in line behind him, all he needed was two Republican

votes from each house of the Legislature to reach two thirds, constitutionally required either for passing a new tax or placing a measure on a state ballot. Brown had also promised he would take any proposed tax increases to the public.

Technically the taxes, if placed on the ballot by June, when they were scheduled to expire, weren't tax increases. So he wanted to be able to say to the public, "I have fulfilled my promise, and haven't even raised taxes."

Weeks went by, and then months. Cold political reality began to set in. The Republicans claimed they were happy to be talking to the governor. It's just that, well, there would be a price he would have to pay to get their votes. And depending who he talked with, and what day he was talking, the price would change. And change again.

**After all, this was a budget discussion. Why were the Republican legislators asking for repeal of the eight hour day, environmental regulations, and collective bargaining for public employees?**

The big items were a cap on state spending and reform of public employee pensions. The governor was willing to have those conversations. As it turned out, though, he wasn't willing to give away the store, and he also didn't want a myriad of other things continually thrown onto a mutating laundry list for discussion. After all, this was a budget discussion. Why were the Republican legislators asking for repeal of the eight hour day, environmental regulations, and

collective bargaining for public employees?

In the end the governor decided to go with a two-step process. Thanks to Proposition 25, he could pass the budget bill with a simple majority. The only complication here was that it would be for the cuts side of the budget only.

According to the Chancellor's office, for the community colleges the 2011-12 budget bills (SB 69 and SB 70) looked like this:

- \$400 million in cuts to base funding
- \$10 per unit increase in student fees
- rejection of the census change proposal
- rejection of the proposal for 1.9% growth
- A new inter-year deferral (\$129 million)
- Approval of the "decoupling" of the 2% Financial Aid Services categorical program, but only on a one-time basis.

Since these cuts and stipulations were based on the assumption that the governor's tax package would make it to the ballot, they were less disastrous than they would have been in an all-cuts budget.

**No election**

But that was then. It is now (late April) clear that there will be no election anytime soon. To pass a budget on time either the Governor will have to find those elusive Republican votes to pass his tax extensions in the Legislature, or go to option two: the all-cuts budget. If there's an option three we haven't heard it yet.

No one seems to know how this will play out. As of this writing CFT is planning to join with its allies in a "Week of Action," May 9-13, to try to pressure a few Republicans into doing the right thing. By the time you read this it may be all over. Or it may not. CCC

By Fred Glass

## LACC faculty member running for CalSTRS board

At a moment when public employee pensions are in the crosshairs of the conservative media machine, it helps to have an advocate in a position to make a difference.

Sharon Hendricks is the CFT-endorsed candidate for the State Teacher Retirement System (CalSTRS) governing board. If elected, she will succeed Carolyn Widener, a sister AFT Local 1521 member, in the one seat (out of twelve) reserved for community college faculty. Board members serve four-year terms. Widener is stepping down after serving on the CalSTRS board since 2001.

Hendricks grew up in the Monterey Bay area and attended California public schools from

kindergarten through high school. Her father is a retired Presbyterian minister and she is the youngest of five kids. After graduate school, she worked as an elementary school speech-language pathologist in the Los Angeles area. For the past six years she has taught full-time in the Speech Department at Los Angeles City College.

She first met Carolyn Widener in the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC) Retirement committee. Hendricks says that Widener "would become my mentor in all things related to retirement."

Widener asked Hendricks to attend CalSTRS Teachers' Retirement Board meetings and learn about the CalSTRS

system. As a result Hendricks became the Retirement Liaison for the Los Angeles College Faculty Guild, AFT Local 1521. In this capacity she has helped other faculty start retirement savings accounts to supplement their pensions as well as plan and host Local 1521's annual benefits conference.

Beyond the nuts and bolts of retirement savings, Hendricks has gotten involved in the coalition building necessary to fend off conservative attacks on public employee pensions. "As pension reform has become a hot button issue at the city, state and national level," she says, "I have become involved in the LA Trustee Network, which brings together California pensions trustees and union activists to inform constituency groups and

advocate for secure retirement for all workers in California."

CFT/CCC president Carl Friedlander has worked closely with Hendricks. He says, "Sharon Hendricks will be a thoughtful, forceful, and persuasive voice on the CalSTRS Board. She understands both the fiscal and political challenges our retirement system faces and she will engage in the kind of regular, two-way communication with faculty that the current situation demands."

The CalSTRS election occurs in the fall. Eligible voters are all active full-time and part-time community college faculty who are in the CalSTRS Defined Benefit or Cash Balance programs. Ballots will be sent out October 1st and voting will end Novem-

ber 30, 2011. For more information, or to find out how to help with Sharon's campaign, go to [www.sharon4STRS.com](http://www.sharon4STRS.com). CCC



**Sharon Hendricks of LACC is the CFT-endorsed candidate for the community college seat on the Cal-STRS board**

## No alternative?

# CFT-sponsored poll finds strong support for taxing the rich

“There is no alternative.” Coined by Ronald Reagan’s pal and mentor, Margaret Thatcher, this phrase has long been the favorite punch line for conservative politicians using public budget problems as an excuse to cut social programs while redistributing wealth upwards through tax breaks to the rich and corporations.

Arnold Schwarzenegger’s version was “We have no choice.” Wisconsin teabag Governor Scott Walker split the difference: “There is no choice” but to slash public employee pay, destroy their pensions, and eliminate collective bargaining rights. Last November Bill Gates added his own wrinkle, telling a national conference of state superintendents of K-12 public instruction that to deal with a combined \$50 billion deficit in their pooled \$500 billion dollar state public education budget, “the only way out” is to eliminate seniority-based step increases and salary increments for masters degrees from teacher collective bargaining agreements.

At the very moment Gates delivered his bright idea, Congress was debating extending Bush’s tax cuts for the rich—which represented \$78 billion dollars a year in their pockets instead of the public’s. If that tax loophole had been allowed to expire, and earmarked for solving the states’ collective education budget deficit, another \$28 billion would have remained to solve other problems. Gates somehow failed to note this coincidence in his remarks.

These ideas represent a politics of distraction. It is the “Look over there!” shouted by the thief as he reaches into your pocket.

Apparently the public is now beginning to listen to someone else. In a telephone opinion poll run in March by San Francisco based pollster Ben Tulchin and paid for by the CFT, the findings are starkly at odds with what the billionaires and their right wing politician friends are saying. Instead, the public is now stating clearly, “We want to tax the rich.”

## Clear picture

The poll looked at two broad issues: how to pay for

public services, and the image of public employees in the wake of events in Wisconsin and other Midwestern states where Republican governors and legislatures are attacking public employee compensation and rights.

800 likely California voters demonstrated a strong understanding—better than a two to one margin—that the wealthy and big corporations have gotten richer in recent years while the middle class and working class have struggled.

There is an equally strong sense that the wealthy and large businesses don’t pay their fair share in taxes to support public services.

The most spectacular response came to the question, “Would you support a ‘1% on the 1%’ tax?” on people making \$500,000 a year and up. This drew a 78% “yes” vote, with support across all geographic areas of the state, all ethnic groups, ages, and political parties. Republicans supported this revenue solution—which would raise \$2.5 billion/year—by a 60% margin.

The interviewees thought it would be a good idea to close business tax loopholes, reassess large commercial properties at current market value (“split roll”), and levy a 10% severance tax on oil (California is the only oil-producing state that has no severance tax).

## In the wake of Wisconsin

The CFT was also interested in finding out the current attitude of the public toward public employees, since the conservative propaganda machine has ratcheted up the volume in attacks on public employee compensation, pensions, K-12 teacher evaluation, and other red herrings. Here, too, the results were encouraging,

although not quite as solid as on the tax issues.

The good news is that while public employees have a modestly favorable image of 56%, the unfavorables are only 13%, with 30% undecided. Support for public employee collective bargaining runs 61% – 32%. These ideas tracked the answer to the question about Wisconsin: which side are you on, the governor’s or the public employees? Here it ran 56% for the public employees and 37% for Walker.

## Taxing the rich, practically speaking

The question about 1% on the 1% has an immediate, practical dimension. Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner has introduced AB 1130 to float the idea in the Legislature. It is not likely to pass, because no Republican

will vote for any tax, any time, and the Legislature needs a 2/3 vote to pass a tax.

However, AB 1130, and the CFT poll results, provide an opportunity for the CFT, and for you, to talk about reasonable state budget solutions. By contacting your legislators and telling them you would prefer to see the wealthiest Californians pay their fair share of taxes, rather than continue to see our colleges and schools crumble, you will help create a new understanding in Sacramento and a new direction to channel

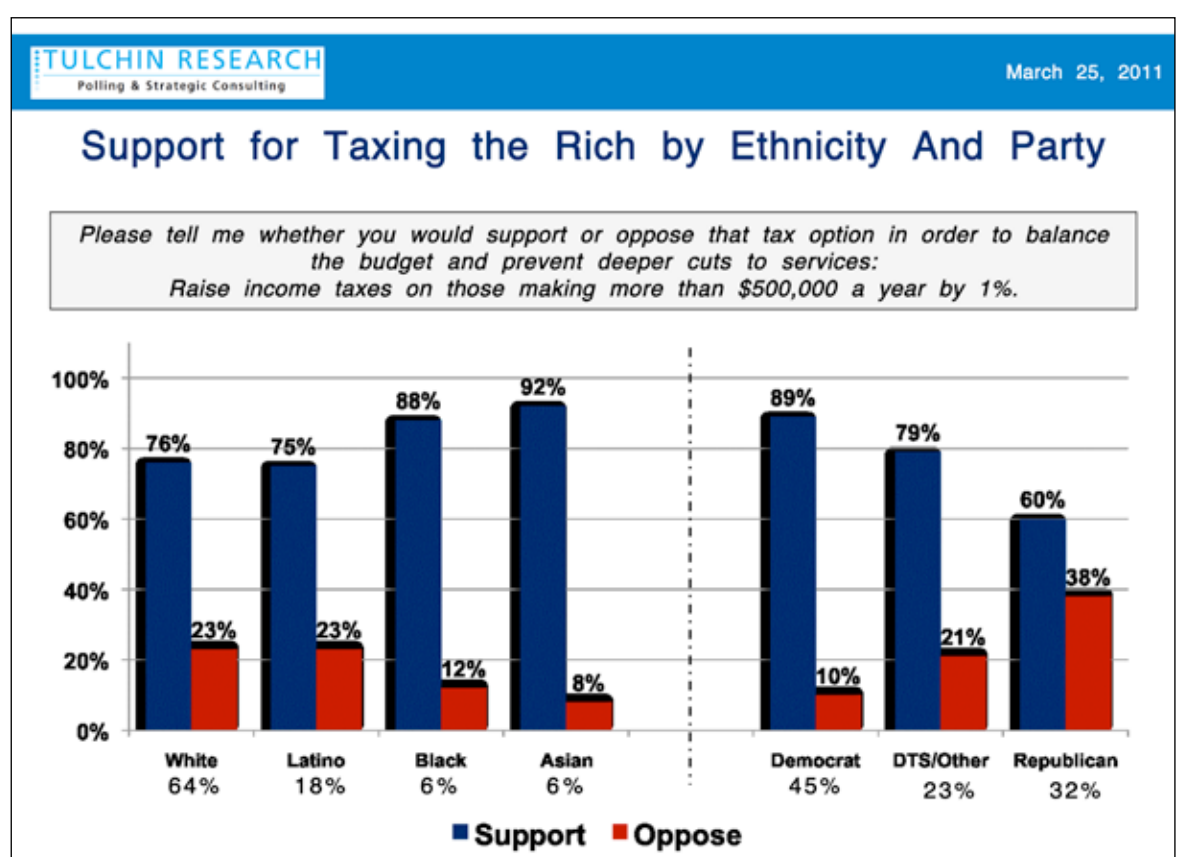
voter anger and frustrations with the economy.

Republican legislators should at the very least be intrigued by the support of their base for 1% on the 1%.

The poll results should encourage CFT members worried about the future of public education, but only if the numbers are taken to their logical conclusion: action in the real world to make these ideas reality. ☐

By Fred Glass

By contacting your legislators and telling them you would prefer to see the wealthiest Californians pay their fair share of taxes, rather than continue to see our colleges and schools crumble, you will help create a new understanding in Sacramento and a new direction to channel voter anger and frustrations with the economy.





## Legislative Update

Judith Michaels, CFT Legislative Director

# Spiking student fees through extension classes

The California Federation of Teachers opposes AB 515 (Brownley), a bill that privatizes certain community college courses by authorizing for-credit extension programs in our colleges. It delineates several criteria for the new configuration, most significantly that these courses must be self-supporting: all costs associated with the extension program must be recovered. Thus, districts would charge these costs back to students in the same way non-resident or foreign students pay the full cost of instruction, with each district determining what that cost would be.

### CFT-sponsored bills begin to move through the Legislature

Find copies of any bill, including votes and analyses, at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>

#### SB 114 (Yee) Transparent salary schedules for part-time faculty and consistent reporting to STRS

Passed the Senate Education Committee March 16, 2011, on a 7-3 vote and moves next to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

#### AB 852 (Fong) Establishes reemployment rights for temporary faculty

Passed the Assembly Higher Education Committee March 29, 2011, on a 6-1 vote and moves next to the Assembly Appropriations Committee

#### AB 383 (Portantino) Limits excessive full-time faculty overload

Heard in the Assembly Higher Education Committee April 11, 2011; after discussion was made a two-year bill, to remain with the Higher Education Committee while discussions take place with potential supporters.

AB 515 represents a step toward privatizing community colleges, moving us in the direction of privatization of all public education, instead of in the direction of access for all.

Unlike contract education courses offered by some districts, these extension courses would be open to the public—presumably the public with money to pay at least \$250.00 per unit. Contract education differs from other courses colleges offer in that the business doing the contracting targets the course at its own employees, and pays the full cost of instruction, including the instructor salary, and perhaps a percentage for use of the colleges facilities. Contract education classes may be held either

in college facilities or in the contractor's offsite location. Not so with the extension programs proposed in AB 515.

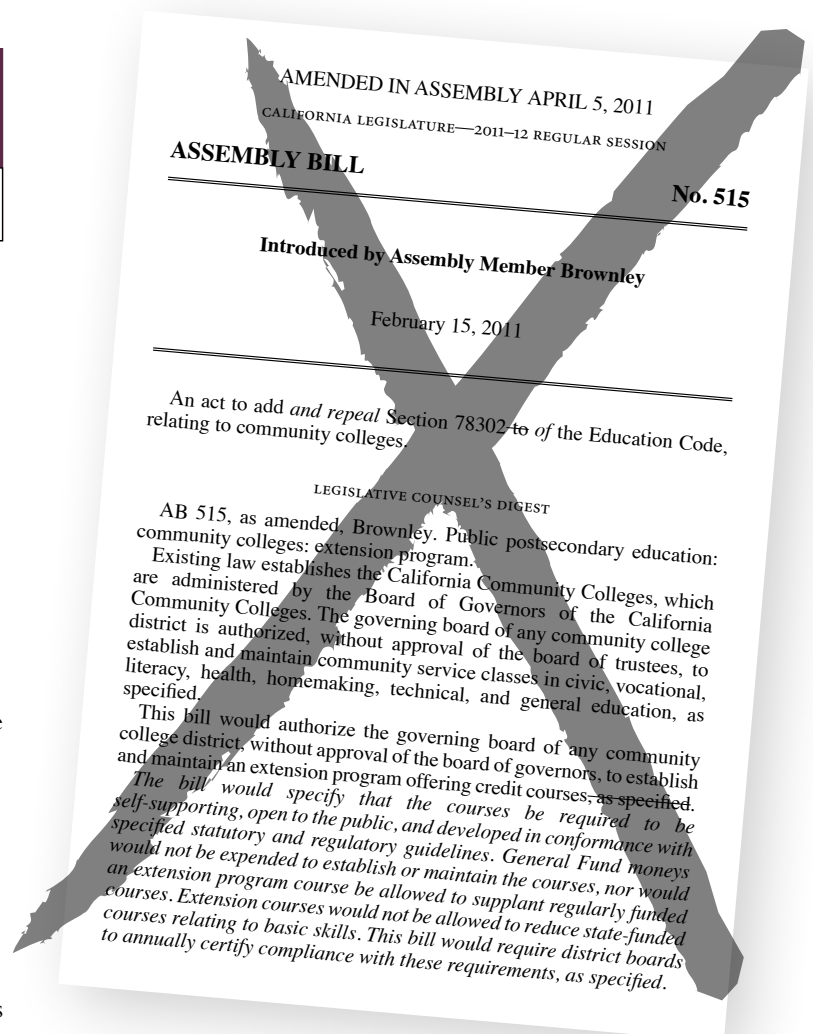
If AB 515 becomes law, there will be two sets of credit classes, some open to all students and others to students who can afford high fees. Many students will be denied access; students on Board of Governors waivers will not be able to enroll, since the waiver system by definition means that students pay no fees. The bill tries to specify

that extension courses will not supplant courses in the regular curriculum; but as colleges struggle to cope with unfunded enrollment, and cut class sections to deal with budget shortfalls, it will be impossible to know whether an extension class has supplanted a regular class.

#### No limit on fees

The CFT remains against all student fees and against all increases in student fees. This bill sets no limit whatsoever on fees for students enrolled in extension classes. AB 515 will trade real access to courses for all students for access for those students who can pay or who can navigate the financial aid system. Moreover, CFT believes that community colleges should not be in the business of generating income from our students, paving the way for additional course sections for those with means, and allowing the state to walk away from its commitment to invest in public education. Additionally, we are concerned about the effect of expanding course offerings in the extension program upon current laws, such as the law governing issues like the 75%/25% ratio, and that address conditions of employment issues for adjunct faculty assignments relative to collective bargaining agreements. These laws and practices have been reaffirmed by many legislatures.

When we raised the issue of other types of grants and aid available to students to pay these greatly increased fees, Assemblywoman Brownley clarified that although BOG waivers could not be used, students could use Federal Pell Grants and Cal Grant B funding, thus putting more pressure on these forms of student aid.



#### Wrong direction

AB 515 represents a step toward privatizing community colleges, moving us in the direction of privatization of all public education, instead of in the direction of access for all. Extension programs in the University of California and in the California State University help to take the college into the community, serving both as an introduction to matriculated upper division work, and as a conduit for upper division professional development and continuing education for professionals such as teachers or nurses.

CFT's officers and members acted assertively to stop this bill in the Assembly Higher Education Committee, where, after a long discussion, it passed the nine-member committee 6-1. Assemblyman Fong voted

against the bill, and Assemblyman Block and Portantino declined to vote. The bill moves next to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

As we work to stop this bill, it's important to remember and delineate the differences between for-profit colleges such as Corinthian, Kaplan, and University of Phoenix, and private non-profit colleges such as University of Southern California, University of the Pacific, or Pepperdine. For-profit colleges exist to return investment to the shareholders, with education as their enterprise. AB 515, though it tries to, does not remake our colleges into for-profit enterprises, but it does lead community colleges into a minefield of entrepreneurial enterprise inappropriate to public institutions. **CCC**



# Students express displeasure at fee increases with “Ramen-Ins”

Standing by a giant mound of Ramen noodle soup boxes in front of Governor Jerry Brown’s empty offices in downtown Los Angeles, Elizabeth Valdejuli told a crowd of reporters, “The beginning of the semesters is the most challenging time for me. When the fees increased from \$20 to \$26 per unit, I was forced to do my grocery shopping with \$11 in my hand.” She added, “When I hear talk of a \$10 fee increase, I think about how many Top Ramen soups are equivalent to the \$300 extra dollars they will be taxing students.”

Valdejuli is a student at L.A. Valley College and Pasadena City College. On Friday, March 4, hundreds of students joined her to deliver thousands of packages of Ramen to the governor’s former offices to dramatize the impact of this huge proposed fee increase. The same day in San Francisco, a smaller but just as determined group of students and faculty made the same point at one of the few regional gubernatorial offices in California remaining open. And in San Diego, two days earlier, a student action group kicked off the “Ramen-Ins” with an early morning TV show, before stag-

ing theirs at yet another closed state office.

The Ramen-In idea was the brainchild of Valdejuli, a student in the AFT Local 1521 intern program overseen by faculty coordinator Zack Knorr. “I was talking to her about the student fee increase proposal,” Knorr told *The Perspective*. “She said, ‘Wow, \$300 is a lot of Ramen.’”

## A tax on the wrong people

“Relying on student fees to compensate for the cuts to education is not a sustainable



“Ramen-Ins” drew media attention across the state to the plight of students facing fee increases, and to alternatives.

“It’s time to put the rich and corporations on a diet. Students are already scraping the bottom of the barrel – or ramen cup – and we call upon the governor and the legislature to spread the pain to those at the top.”

solution,” San Francisco City College student Lena Carew said at her Bay Area event. “Our legislators need to bring better solutions to the table and soon, because momentum is building and students are organizing, and we won’t let them take our education, our future.” SFCC instructor and AFT 2121 president Alisa Messer suggested a better solution in her comments: “Student fees represent a tax on the wrong people. Students should not have to shoulder the burden of the state’s budget

crisis when there are so many wealthy people in this state who are not paying their fair share.”

In San Diego, student Jose Rodriguez complained, “We will be eating Ramen for breakfast, lunch and dinner.” One of his professors, Lorissa Dorman, told reporters, “On a campus like San Diego City College, it is clear that the fee increases will push many of our students out of higher education altogether. It is devastating to think that we spend more on prisons than on higher education in this state. With one of the worst wealth distributions we have seen in the U.S. since the Great Depression it is unconscionable that we would cut something as vital to democracy as education.”

## Alternative solutions

At each of the demonstrations, students and faculty pointed out that when Congress passed its extension of the Bush tax cuts in December, the richest top one percent of Californians pocketed an extra \$9 billion per year. The California state budget deficit is \$18 billion. In other words, “The tax cut for billionaires and millionaires would solve half our state budget deficit,” as Dorman put it.

The protesters called for passage of AB 1239 (Furutani), that would increase income taxes on those who make more than a quarter million dollars a year. A temporary 10% income tax bracket would be established for those making over \$250,000, and an 11% tax bracket for those with taxable incomes over \$400,000. These tax brackets are similar to those established by former Governor Wilson, and would expire after 5 years.

San Diego City College student Jose Rodriguez extended the Ramen food metaphor in his remarks: “It’s time to put the rich and corporations on a diet. Students are already scraping the bottom of the barrel – or ramen cup – and we call upon the governor and the legislature to spread the pain to those at the top.”

The Ramen-Ins gained widespread media coverage. Go to [www.cft.org](http://www.cft.org) for some examples.

“Relying on student fees to compensate for the cuts to education is not a sustainable solution. Our legislators need to bring better solutions to the table and soon, because momentum is building and students are organizing, and we won’t let them take our education, our future.”

By Fred Glass



San Diego students caught the early morning TV cycle.

# Local Action

## College of Marin

### A new contract, at long last

After six years without a contract, United Professors of Marin reached agreement with College of Marin in February, and ratified the contract shortly afterwards. "This agreement puts an end to five years of no progress, and shows that a contract was within reach all that time," said Ira Lansing, president of United Professors of Marin, AFT Local 1610.

Instructors, who have gone without a raise for almost three years, will finally get a small one: 1% this year, and 0.5% in the 2011-2012 academic year. In addition, faculty kept district-paid premiums for health insurance, although co-pays will rise.

These provisions meet three of the five make-it-or-break-it terms the union told an arbitrator last fall would cause a strike. The union was given strike sanction by the North Bay Labor Council in 2009. "Members told us their highest priority was salary increases for full time and part time faculty, and the maintenance of our health benefits," Lansing said. "We achieved that. But the pay increases were not retroactive."

### Concessions

While the agreement was the best that could be achieved under

the circumstances, he cautioned, it contained concessions. A message to members posted on the local's website explained that "the new contract represents a number of take backs on the part of the district, instances where previous contracts may have restricted actions the district could take with a unit member, such as making certain work assignments or limiting the number of teaching units that can be banked. The new contract removes these restrictions, arguably making working conditions less ideal."

The College administration was happy. "It's good for the college, it's good for the professors, and I really believe it's heralding a new era of better relations internally on the campus," Diana Conti, president of the board of trustees, told the *Marin Independent-Journal*. The district nevertheless estimated that the contract would add to its expected \$650,000 deficit in its \$44 million budget.

One possible reason for administration happiness is that it will be able to hire more part time faculty. Right now, there are 83 full time professors, and over 200 part timers. Like other districts throughout the state, Marin is obligated to move towards the state-mandated goal of 75% full time positions, but also like other districts, has used the budget crisis as a pretext for backsliding.

### Modest increases

"While very modest increases in the salary schedules have been won, they do not meet the cost of living expenses for the Bay Area," Lansing added.

The raises will not take the college's teachers even to the level of Kent Middle School, across the road from the college, where a teacher with a masters degree and 15 years on the job gets \$17,000 a year more.

The contract saga at Marin began in 2007, with the expiration of the old agreement. A new agreement was reached but never signed. Meanwhile it expired, and negotiations for a new one slowed to a crawl, and began moving in reverse.

The district replaced its old negotiator with its attorney, Larry Frierson, who became its highest paid employee, earning over \$600,000 in three years. Its negotiators put on the table a number of changes that the union viewed as direct attacks. The district sought to remove union advocates from the evaluation process. It demanded that the union give up its office space on campus, and denied it the use of district reprographics, despite the fact that the union was paying for both. The district fought to arbitration grievances that should have been settled quickly. The union fought politically

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Fair taxes on millionaires and corporations  
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as well, defeating one board member in the 2009 election.

Finally in December, a new President arrived at the district, David Coons. "I met with Coons the first day," Lansing recalls, "and asked him if he wanted to settle the contract. He said 'yes' right away, so he came in with the right attitude. But the fact that he said 'yes' in December, and we got a contract by February, makes one wonder what was going on with the previous administration for five years. In reality, they didn't want an agreement that wasn't 100% on their own terms." ☐

## San Diego

### The Ferrari in the garage

The AFT Guild at San Diego, Grossmont and Cuyamaca Community Colleges, Local 1931, recently took a page from the book of the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers. They negotiated with the San Diego Community College District an agreement, called the Resource Allocation Formula (RAF), which sets a ratio for the division of new revenue.

"Our purpose," says San Diego Guild President Jim Mahler, "is to establish a situation in which the district and union know what percentage of the pie each will get from new revenue." On the local union website, the formula summary states that it gives the bargaining units a bigger share of new resources than the previous RAF (85% of all new revenue,

vs. 80% of COLA and 20% of growth previously).

The Guild represents the vast majority of SDCC employees, so if the current fiscal crisis ends, and new money is appropriated by the state, it will be able to decide how 85% of that money will be spent. "It's like a shopping cart," Mahler explains. "We can use it for anything from paying for office hours to increases for adjuncts. We get to make that decision."

The formula does not govern how the district spends its existing budget, although the 85/15 ratio was derived from what currently exists. At present, the budget for the district is being cut, not supplemented by new revenues. Mahler says it is having to absorb a \$10 million reduction this year, on top of \$20 cut previously. "We're taking a big hit," he says. Those reductions led to eliminating many sections and a hiring freeze.

The resource allocation formula is not actually a part of the local union contract, which was settled this year and extends for three years. It is a side agreement between the district and union.

"We look at it like a Ferrari that's parked in the garage," Mahler says. "We can't actually drive it right now. But we hope our situation will change, and in the future we can put this agreement to work." ☐

By David Bacon



The annual "March in March" drew several thousand students and supporters to Sacramento in a rainstorm.